

APPENDIX A

CEQA NOTICE OF PREPARATION



CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY

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NOTICE OF PREPARATION

TO: FROM: Mehdi Morshed
Executive Director
California High-Speed Rail Authority 925 L Street,
Suite 1425
Sacramento, California 95814

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Program Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Impact Statement (Program EIR/EIS) for a Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train; References: Division 13, Public Resources Code, Section 21080.4 (CEQA) and 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1501.7 and 1508.22 (NEPA).

This is to inform you that the California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) as the Lead Agency for the CEQA process for a proposed California High-Speed Train system, has determined that it would be appropriate to prepare a Program EIR/EIS for the Bay Area to Central Valley segment of the High-Speed Train (HST) system at this conceptual stage of planning and decision-making, which would involve defining and evaluating alternative corridors, and station locations.

This NOP initiates the CEQA process. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), an operating administration within the United States Department of Transportation, will serve as federal lead agency for the environmental review. The FRA has responsibility for oversight of the safety of railroad operations, including the safety of any proposed high-speed train system. The FRA will publish a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register* announcing the agency's intention to initiate the federal environmental review process for this segment of the HST project.

The Authority and the FRA recently completed a Program EIR/EIS as the first-phase of a tiered environmental review process for the Proposed California HST system, and as part of the selected HST Alternative defined a broad corridor between the Bay Area and Central Valley generally bounded by (and including) the Pacheco Pass (SR-152) to the South, the Altamont Pass (I-580) to the North, the BNSF Corridor to the East, and the Caltrain Corridor to the West.¹ The Bay Area to Central Valley HST Program EIR/EIS will further examine this broad corridor as the next phase of the tiered environmental review process. Later stages of HST system development will include tiered site-specific project environmental documents to assess the impacts of the individual HST projects being implemented and site(s) chosen before construction.

The preparation of this Bay Area to Central Valley HST Program EIR/EIS is being coordinated with the concurrent preparation of a Bay Area Regional Rail Plan by a coalition of the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART), the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), the Peninsula Joint Powers Board (Caltrain) and the Authority. Bay Area voters in 2004 passed Regional Measure 2, which requires MTC to adopt a Regional Rail Plan. As stipulated in the Streets and Highways Code Section 30914.5 (f), the Regional Rail Plan will define the future passenger rail

¹ Highway route numbers are provided only as a convenient reference for the reader, not as a limitation on the corridor to be considered.

transportation network for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, including an evaluation of the HST options. Information on the Regional Rail Plan is available on the internet at: [www.bayarearailplan.info].

Public scoping meetings together with regional rail plan workshops have been scheduled as an important component of the scoping process for both the state and federal environmental review. Scoping meetings will be advertised locally and additional public notice will be provided separately with the dates, times, and locations of these scoping meetings. Scoping meetings are scheduled for the following major cities:

- **Oakland** on November 29, 2005 – Joseph P. Bort Metrocenter, Larry Dahms Auditorium, 101 Eighth Street, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- **San Jose** on November 30, 2005 – New San Jose City Hall – Council Wing, Community Room, W120, 200 East Santa Clara Street, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- **San Francisco** on December 1, 2005 – San Francisco Civic Center Complex, Hiram Johnson Building, Auditorium, 455 Golden Gate Avenue, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- **Livermore** on December 5, 2005 – Livermore public San Francisco Civic Center Complex, Hiram Johnson Building, San Diego Room, 455 Golden Gate Avenue, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- **Modesto** on December 6, 2005 – Double Tree Hotel, 1150 Ninth Street, Modesto, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- **Suisun City** on December 8, 2005 – Suisun City Hall, Council Chambers, 701 Civic Center Blvd., from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

In response to this NOP, you are requested to advise the Authority of the applicable environmental review requirements of your agency, and the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the Program EIR/EIS prepared by our agency when considering your approvals or future permits for the HST project.

The need for a HST system is directly related to the expected growth in population and resulting increases in intercity travel demand in California over the next twenty years and beyond. As a result of this growth in travel demand, there will be more travel delays from the growing congestion on California's highways and at airports. In addition, there will be effects on the economy and quality of life from a transportation system that is less and less reliable as travel demand increases and deteriorating air quality in and around our metropolitan areas. The intercity highway system, commercial airports, and conventional passenger rail serving the intercity travel market are currently operating at or near capacity, and will require large public investments for maintenance and expansion in order to meet existing demand and future growth. The proposed HST system would provide a new mode of high-speed intercity travel that would link the major metropolitan areas of the state; interface with international airports, mass transit, and highways; and provide added capacity to meet increases in intercity travel demand in California in a manner sensitive to and protective of California's unique natural resources.

The Authority and the FRA recently completed a Program EIR/EIS for the proposed California HST System. The proposed HST system would be over 700-miles long, capable of speeds over 200 miles per hour with electrically powered trains on fully grade-separated tracks with state-of-the-art safety, signaling, and train control systems. The proposed system would connect and serve California's major metropolitan areas, extending from Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area through the Central Valley to Los Angeles and San Diego. The Program EIR/EIS established the purpose and need of the HST system, analyzed a proposed high-speed train alternative, and compared it with a No Project/No Action Alternative and a Modal Alternative. Through the Program EIR/EIS, the Authority and the FRA selected the HST Alternative and selected certain corridors/general alignments, general station locations, mitigation strategies, design practices and further measures to guide development of the HST system at the site-specific project level to avoid and minimize potential adverse environmental impacts. For the Bay Area to Central Valley segment, the Authority and the FRA selected a broad corridor between the Bay Area and the Central Valley containing a number of feasible route options and proposed further study to make programmatic selections of alignments and stations.² This corridor is generally bounded by (and includes) the Pacheco Pass (SR-152) to the south, the Altamont Pass (I-580) to the north, the BNSF Corridor to the east, and the Caltrain Corridor to the west, but the Authority would not pursue alignment options through Henry Coe State Park and station options at Los Banos.

² The FRA consulted with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and CEQ concurred that the proposed approach would be consistent with NEPA and would provide for compliance with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

This next Program EIR/EIS would help to identify a preferred alignment connecting the Bay Area to the Central Valley HST system segment. Alternatives to be evaluated and analyzed in the "Bay Area to Central Valley HST Program EIR/EIS" include (1) take no action (No-Project); and (2) alternative HST corridor, alignment, and station options for construction of a steel-wheel-on-steel-rail HST system through the previously defined broad corridor from the Central Valley and terminating at stations in the San Francisco Bay area (see Attachment A – Alternatives Description). Possible environmental impacts include displacement of commercial and residential properties; community and neighborhood impacts and disruption; increased noise along rail corridors; traffic impacts associated with stations; effects to historic properties or archaeological sites; impacts to parks and recreation resources; visual quality effects; exposure to seismic and flood hazards; impacts to water resources, wetlands, and sensitive biological species and habitat; land use compatibility impacts; energy use; and impacts to agricultural lands.

Due to the time limits mandated by state law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice. We invite your suggestions about the range of alternatives and the potential impacts to be addressed in the Bay Area to Central Valley HST Program EIR/EIS. See Attachment B – Program EIR/EIS Schedule for our planned two-year process.

Please send your response and direct any comments or questions regarding this project to Dan Leavitt, Deputy Director of the California High-Speed Rail Authority at the address shown above.



Date: November 14, 2005

Signature: _____
Mehdi Morshed, Executive Director

FIGURE B

**BAY AREA TO CENTRAL VALLEY TIER I EIS/PROGRAM EIR
Summary Schedule – September, 2005**

